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Hoboken City Hall
86-98 Washington Street
Hoboken
Hudson County
New Jersey

HABS No. NJ-51

P H O T O G R A P H S

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

Name: Hoboken City Hall

Location: 86-98 Washington Street (faces Washington St.)

Present Owner, Present Occupant, Present Use: Mayor and City Council of the City of Hoboken, municipal offices; Hoboken, Hudson County, New Jersey.

Significance: City Hall has served as Hoboken's political center since 1883, and was the first building in Hoboken ever constructed exclusively as a city hall. An 1880 Act of the State Legislature authorized cities without city halls to construct ones on city-held or donated public squares.

Hoboken typifies the proverbial "melting pot" for immigrants of all nations. It is therefore very significant that its city hall was built by a German immigrant, Francis George Himpler, who adopted Hoboken as his second home and subsequently become an architect of regional and national significance. City Hall was designed by him during the prime of his career, after he had completed the designs of several civic and religious buildings in Hoboken.

City Hall also derives significance as a military center--its top floor originally housed an armory. When the hall was enlarged in 1911, a floor was added and the armory was relocated to the new top floor.

At dawn of the Progressive movement in Hoboken (c. 1911), recommendations were made by the Board of Trade to expand and rehabilitate the City Hall building. An addition made from 1912-1913 created one additional floor and placed two wings and a Beaux-Arts entry portico onto the main facade of the 1883 structure. The addition symbolizes the ambition of the city in the first decade of the twentieth century in striving to be "modern." In 1976, City Hall, nominated to the National Register, underwent a rehabilitation which included a new roof, new windows, and the stabilization and restoration of its brownstone and copper trim. Once again, the preservation and reuse of the building was chosen, a preference that reflects the growing appreciation of the old architecture of Hoboken.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. c. 1881-1883 (Annual Financial Statements 1881-1882; 1882-1883).

Alteration/addition: c. 1912-1913 (Annual Financial Statement, 1912-1913).

2. Architect: Francis George Himpler (refs. to remuneration by City for "first best plan," payment for plans, and "architect's fees," Annual Financial Statement, (1880-81)).
3. Builder, contractor, suppliers: masonry work by Sander & Carroll, carpentry by Louis Meystre, furniture supplied by Cordts Furniture Co., and painting of cornices and lettering of office entrances by Stephen Bayles, a local painter.
4. Original Plans and Construction: Building was two stories high, with a 1/2 story basement and rusticated stone foundation. It was of the Second Empire style, with a slate mansard roof with attic story dormers. The entry was gained through an arched doorway, with a Gibbsian surround, surmounted by a segmental arch in brownstone. The location of the entry was emphasized by its projection by approximately one foot from the facade. This bay was protruded somewhat with a tower effect, and had a roof higher than that of the mansard. The facade had a strong classical feeling, expressed as Renaissance Revival--the second floor window lintels have segmental arches, while the first story lintels are pedimented. The corners of the principal facade and projecting entry bay set off with quoining. Early city records indicate that awnings were used on the windows, as illustrated in Figs. 9, 10, and 11. The cost of construction of City Hall was approximately \$60,320.

Unfortunately, no original drawings of city hall are known to have survived. The Hoboken Public Library has in its photography files views of City Hall prior to the 1912 addition. The Library also has in its Reference Department the following publications which include photographic views of City Hall: The Evening News and Hoboken (1893); and "Hoboken Illustrated," a Special Edition of the New York Dawn, Jan. 1909.

5. Alterations and additions: 1912-13 Schneider and Dieffenback, architects. By this time, City Hall was considered "entirely too small for the needs of the city." Two new wings were erected on the Washington Street side of the building, and the entire interior was rearranged. Large "terrace stairs" were added to the entrance, creating a landing, above which a portico 38 feet wide, supported by brownstone Ionic columns, rises 22 feet. It was intended for "reviewing purposes" and to give the building "an imposing effect." The original iron railing in front of the building was replaced by a stone coping around the two front wings. A new jail was erected at the rear of the building. The new front wing was to provide offices of the Mayor and City Clerk. The wing closest to First Street was for the Collector of Revenue, Comptroller and Board of Assessors. The second floor provided a Council Chambers and District Court 22 feet larger than the previous one. A new top floor was added as armory and exhibition areas. Off the armory were a large company room and rooms for captains and petty officers. A new mansard roof with standing seam tin roofing and a brick elevator shaft were added to the rear of the building. The hallway was also equipped with new stairs as part of the renovation.

- B. Historical Context: Municipal offices have been continuously housed at city hall since 1883. Examination of city records shows that most municipal functions present in the past still continue today, with the exemptions of city physicians and the overseer of the poor. The top floor armory was in use when, during World War I, Hoboken was a major port of embarkation for troops sailing for Europe. Major political receptions occurred on the steps of City Hall. (for more political information cf. History of Municipalities of Hudson County, Daniel Van Winkel, ed., Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1924)

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

- A. Description of Exterior: Because the 1883 City Hall was altered considerably in 1911, much of the exterior combines the older portion, to the west, and the addition. The Second Empire facade of the original building is most fully visible on the Newark and First Street facades. Toward Washington Street, however, we can see the two wings that were added in 1911. The

Bloomfield Street facade has an addition in beige brick of an elevator shaft, and the Washington street facade has a broad portico. The newer portion is of beige brick, with brownstone belt courses. The windows with rectangular lintels are generally less ornamented than those of the original building. The building has a braquettted copper cornice. The rebuilt armory, located on the third floor, is of matching beige brick and also has rectangular window enframements. This area is covered by a hipped roof, and the portico is topped with a brownstone balustrade. Although the exterior masonry was cleaned during the renovation in 1976, serious brownstone spalling continues. (See Figures 1-3)

B. Interior: Access is through a groin-vaulted entry which leads into a transverse groin-vaulted hall running the full width of the building. The first floor is laid in a gray minton tile with a foliated border. Openings to various departments have wooden pediments. On the first floor is the courtroom with tin ceiling, mahogany woodwork, county clerk and tax collectors' offices, which have carved wooden counters. Access to the second floor is through a rear stair hall with an offset, open-well stair. A cast iron newell post supports a lighting fixture in the form of an Ionic column. The rail is of cast and wrought iron. This stairway gives access to a wide hall with offices which correspond to locations on first floor. The mayor's office is in the southeast corner. The second floor hallway has a pressed metal ceiling with deep cove moldings. (See Figs. 4-7)

C. Site: The building faces east, and is set in the beginning of the central business district, at the core of the earliest commercial thoroughfare of the city. The main entry is directly opposite a row of commercial shops. Its square site makes it one of the few detached buildings in the city. The site of city hall was formerly a market square, laid out in 1804, by Col. John Stevens, the inventor who first improved and developed the city. On March 15, 1880, the market square was conveyed to the city by the Hoboken Land & Improvement Company, comprised of Col. Stevens' successors, with the condition that the site remain in use for a city hall, or its title would revert to the successors of the Land & Improvement Company.

City Hall has traditionally had a grassed area around its two front wings, elevated by a brownstone coping. This area is filled with plants and surrounded by a low wooden fence. On either side of the wings were benches. A rectangular garden of modern brick is located in front of the main steps. The city hall entry is lit by four street lamps--Roman Doric columns with main scrolls for holding the light fixtures (cast by J.W. Fiske). Most sidewalks are of grey slate.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings:

April 4, 1977 Beckstoffer/Hunter Associates, Boston,
MA.

B. Early Views: The Evening News and Hoboken (Hoboken: 1893).

Art Work of Hoboken, West Hoboken, Union Hill and
Weehawken (Chicago: W.H. Parish, 1893).

"Hoboken Illustrated" special edition of the New York
Dawn, Jan. 1909.

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary Sources: Annual Financial Statements,
1880-1881; 1881-1883; 1912-1913; collection,
Hoboken Free Public Library, Reference Department.

2. "The City Hall Building; Committee Finds Conditions
Wretched and Suggests Changes" Board of Trade
Bulletin (Feb.-Mar. 1911), P. 6-7.

"How the Hoboken City Hall Will Look After All
Alterations are Completed" Hudson Observer, Jan. 20,
1912, p.1.

The Bicentennial Comes to Hoboken, John Heaney, 1976.

The Hoboken of Yesterday, Vol. II, George Long Moller, 19
(Hoboken: 1966).

"Historic Site Assessment," Beckstoffer/Hunter Assoc.,
(Boston: 1976).

National Register of Historic Places Inventory
Nomination Form, 1976.

(D. Likely sources not yet investigated)

E. Supplemental Material:

1. "The City Hall Building," Board of Trade Bulletin,
Feb. - Mar. 1911.
2. "How the Hoboken City Hall Will Look After All
Alterations Are Completed," Hudson Observer,
Jan. 20, 1912.
3. "Historic Site Assessment," Beckstoffer/Hunter Assoc.,
Boston: 1976.

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July, 1981